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Gary S. May, Chancellor

Gladstone Institutes
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My Diversity Story: Strengthening Innovation and Social Outcomes

It could have been me

By Gary S. May

I may work in the halls of academia, but I still live in the real world. All too frequently, I'm reminded of that fact. The barrage is constant: Birding while black, shopping while black, cooking outdoors while black, exercising while black. It is just exhausting. And I'm tired.

George Floyd could have been any African American man, including me. At a traffic stop, no one knows I am a chancellor. No one knows I have a doctorate.

"I can't breathe." These were the last words uttered by Eric Garner as he was being murdered on Staten Island in 2014.

"I can't breathe." These were among the last words spoken by George Floyd as he suffered the same fate under hauntingly similar circumstances in Minneapolis on Memorial Day.

In 2014, I tried to explain the Garner incident to my two daughters. Last week, I tried to explain the Floyd incident to myself. In both cases, I fell short. Murder captured on video defies explanation.

I can't claim to speak for all African Americans or all people of color. And to ask me or others like me to do so is a burden no one should have to carry.

However, as chancellor of a top public university with nearly 40,000 students, people look to me to weigh in on important issues. Indeed, they often expect it. Perhaps it's to help make sense of things, like I sometimes struggle to do for myself.

As a lifelong educator and an African American whose parents endured the surge of segregation personally, I've spent much of my career working to increase diversity on college campuses and in the workforce.

A lot about how America has made much progress as we often see. Comments of this week have only helped to build an inclusive society that respects and respects

At a traffic stop, no one knows I have a doctorate or am chancellor of a 40,000-student university



Karin Higgins / UC Davis

I'm talking about the full array of nationalities, the full spectrum of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, along with the wide variety of political views and gender identities — and a rich diversity of talents and skill sets.

This is not a bow to political correctness. As an engineer and leader in higher education, I'm convinced that the more diverse the mix, the more likely we are to make discoveries and solve problems.

Voice-recognition systems did not respond to female voices until we had women on design teams. Even now, research shows that facial-recognition algorithms don't work as effectively with people who have darker skin like me. These are practical examples of how diversity can lead to better outcomes.

But diversity — like social justice — doesn't come easy.

It requires collective effort. It requires each one of us, in our own way, working to make a difference, whether that's through video recording, peaceful protest or working to change procedures that reflect bias.

Diversity — like social justice — is everybody's job. Each of us must do what we can — where we are — to eliminate racism, sexism and other negative influences on our progression as a nation.

Perhaps then we can create a way forward. Perhaps then we can realize the opportunities afforded by an equitable and inclusive society. Perhaps then our children and grandchildren might know an America, where every person can walk down the street or sit in a coffee shop or a park without fear.

Perhaps then we can breathe.

San Francisco Chronicle — June 7, 2020

the second in the entire U.S. previously served as dean of the Institute of Technology



In the beginning . . .

The May family:
St. Louis in the
late 1970's



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MY HEARTFELT CONGRATULATIONS TO YOU ON YOUR SELECTION AS
A 1981 PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLAR.

THE COMMISSION ON PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS HAS DETERMINED THAT
YOU HAVE MADE OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS AND ARE RECOGNIZING
YOU AS REPRESENTING THE FINEST QUALITIES IN AMERICAN EDUCATION.
YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO ATTEND THE WASHINGTON D.C.
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CELEBRATE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENT AS A 1981 PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLAR.
YOU WILL BE RECEIVING DETAILED INFORMATION SHORTLY.

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High School Honors



Inspiration: Then and Now

Rising Above Our History





The Undergraduate Years: Finding My Way

A Key Role
Model:
Dr. Augustine
Esogbue





“You can’t be what you don’t see. I didn’t think about being a doctor. I didn’t even think about being a clerk in a store; I’d never seen a black clerk in a clothing store.”

– *Dr. Jocelyn Elders,*
Former U.S Surgeon General

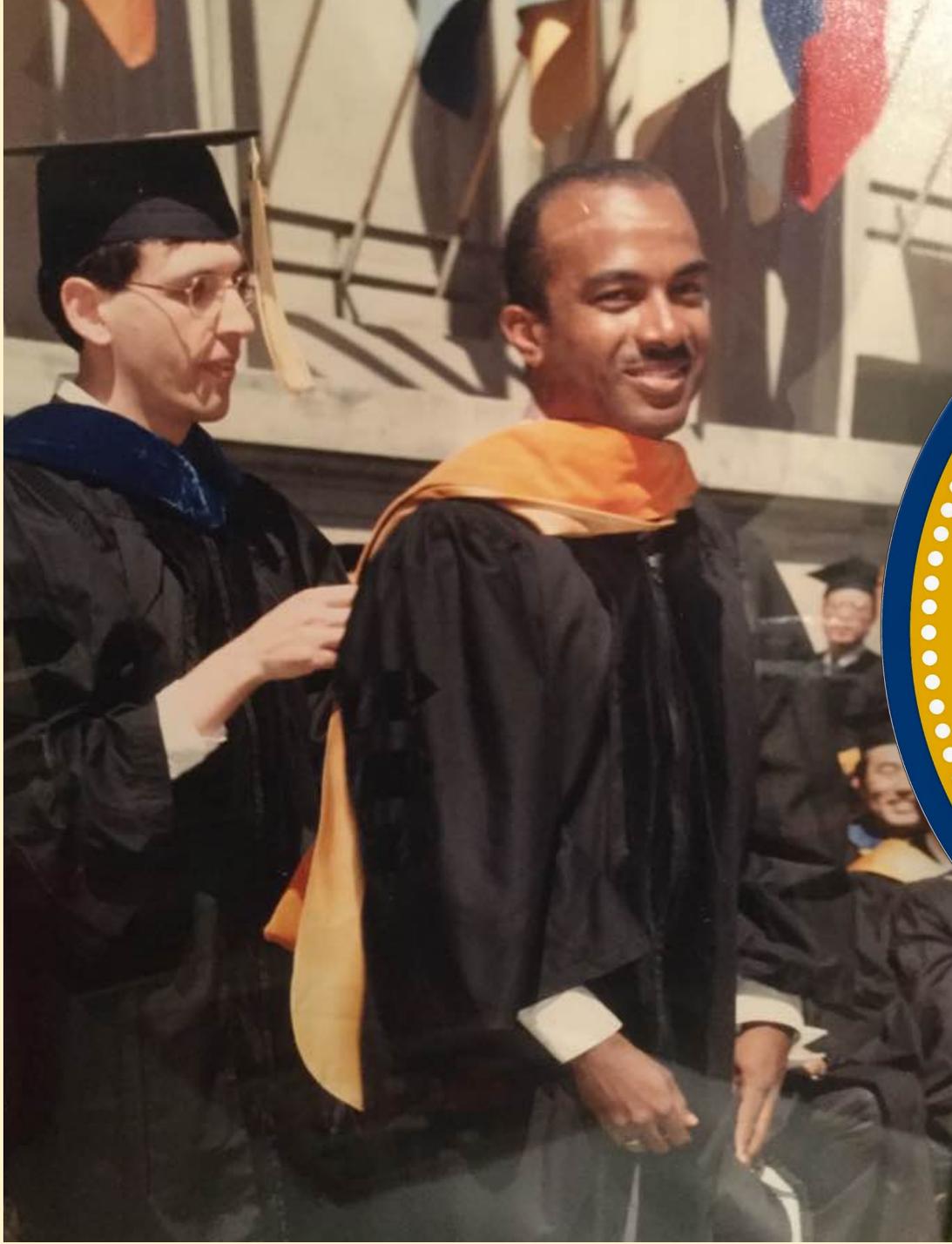


Spark change with
the National Society
of Black Engineers

#GivingTuesday



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A Great Honor: 2015 Mentoring Award

Lessons in Leadership

Wayne Clough,
President Emeritus of
Georgia Tech





UC Davis: The Next Level of Leadership



Why We Need Diversity in STEM



Racial Bias in AI?



← 100m

48
mph

- /Autonomous
- /Sensor
- /Communication
- /Battery
- /Navigation
- /Adaptive
- /Safety





Diversity Leads to Better Outcomes

Questions?

